

VZCZCXRO9938
OO RUEHAG RUEHBI RUEHCI RUEHLH RUEHPW RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHAH #0083/01 0190748
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 190748Z JAN 09
FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2161
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 4709
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 2510
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2375
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 2957
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3249
RHMFISS/CDR USTRANSCOM SCOTT AFB IL

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ASHGABAT 000083

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/19/2019

TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: GENERAL PETRAEUS MEETING WITH
TURKMEN PRESIDENT BERDIMUHAMEDOV

REF: ASHGABAT 0081

Classified By: Charge Richard Miles, reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (C) Summary. On January 16, CENTCOM Commander, General Petraeus, accompanied by Charge Miles, met with Turkmen President Berdimuhamedov for over an hour. Berdimuhamedov was accompanied by Foreign Minister Meredov. Berdimuhamedov paid close attention to the detailed strategic briefing of the present situation in Iraq and Afghanistan provided by General Petraeus. The General expressed appreciation for the current Turkmen support for U.S. and coalition efforts in Afghanistan and asked for Turkmen agreement to join with other countries in allowing the land transit of commercial, non-lethal cargo through Turkmenistan and on to Afghanistan*the Northern Distribution Network (NDN). As expected, Berdimuhamedov defended the present level of support and said that provision of land transport, beyond "humanitarian cargo" would violate Turkmenistan's policy of "positive neutrality." Petraeus' repeated effort to bring about a change in Berdimuhamedov position resulted only in an agreement for the General and the Foreign Minister to discuss the issue further in a separate conversation (septel). The General did raise the long-stalled issue of obtaining Turkmen approval of necessary technical work to allow resumption of the "Gas and Go" facility at the Ashgabat airport. Berdimuhamedov described the concern of the Turkmen Government over alleged violations of Turkmen air space by "NATO" aircraft near the Turkmen-Afghanistan border. Petraeus agreed to look into this. The meeting ended as it had begun with greetings from the U.S. leadership to Berdimuhamedov and the latter's greetings to President Bush and President-Elect Obama. During the conversation President Berdimuhamedov did ask the Charge to begin exploratory work on a possible visit to the U.S. later this year. End Summary.

¶2. (U) General Petraeus told Berdimuhamedov he carried greetings from the American leadership. He mentioned recent conversations he had had on the region with Secretary-designate Clinton. Berdimuhamedov responded in kind, quoting a Turkmen proverb, "Both he who sends greetings and he who brings them should enjoy health and prosperity." He asked the General to convey his greetings to President Bush and added that he hoped for good relations with President-Elect Obama.

13. (C) General Petraeus then gave Berdimuhamedov a detailed, strategic briefing on the situation in Iraq (improving) and Afghanistan (deteriorating). He described probable developments with regard to U.S. troop deployments in that context and also went over the schedule of elections coming up in Afghanistan. He handed Berdimuhamedov a copy of the MNF-Iraq Commander's Counterinsurgency Guidance which he had issued last July. Berdimuhamedov paid very close attention to the General's brief and accompanying charts, asking questions to clarify certain points. The General expressed U.S. appreciation for the support which Turkmenistan presently provided, specifically Turkmenistan's direct support to Afghanistan and, in particular, Turkmenistan's approval of broad over flight by U.S. aircraft, land transit of fuel, and the "Gas and Go" facility at Ashgabat airport. He noted that all this was done within the framework of Turkmenistan's policy of "positive neutrality." He did note that we had been waiting for some time for Turkmen approval to proceed with necessary technical work on the re-fueling facility valves to enable a resumption of the "Gas and Go" activity at the Ashgabat airport.

14. (C) Berdimuhamedov expressed his appreciation for the General's briefing and opening remarks. He complimented the General for his leadership in bringing about positive results in Iraq. We, too want stability and security in the region, he said. We are aware of the danger of political and religious extremism and terrorism. We have been under pressure from many Muslim countries to support the Palestinians in the present stage of their struggle, but we

ASHGABAT 00000083 002 OF 003

do not interfere in the internal affairs of others and they (even Iran) do not interfere in our internal processes. Our policy of positive neutrality is very important to us. We do try to provide support to Afghanistan, he said. We are paying for the electrical transmission line from Turkmenistan into Afghanistan and our experts maintain the Afghan railroad. We have sent cooking oil, flour and other foodstuffs. We are constructing a girls' school and a medical center in Afghanistan near our border. We have thought about laying a gas pipeline into Afghanistan * when the security situation improves. But, he went on, Afghanistan today is not dealing with neighboring countries in a normal fashion. Narcotics traffickers constantly try to bring narcotics across our borders. Every day, we seize five to twenty-five kilograms of narcotics which have come across the border -- and these narcotics traffickers are linked to extremist groups in Afghanistan. This is a serious problem, he emphasized. Within the past six months, at least two dozen narcotics laboratories have been set up in Afghanistan near our border. What is needed is a change in the mentality of the people, beginning in school.

15. (C) General Petraeus agreed that Afghanistan was a major source of illegal narcotics. We are going after it, he emphasized, and we value the cooperative relationship we have with the Turkmen law enforcement authorities responsible for suppressing the narcotics trade. Petraeus added that he would meet with several of these Turkmen officials later in the day. Berdimuhamedov then reeled off a rather accurate list of those officials who had been in the U.S. recently for orientation or training. We need to continue this cooperation, he said. Extremism and narcotics trafficking are linked and we have to suppress both.

16. (C) Berdimuhamedov then complained about alleged violations of Turkmen air space in the Afghan-Turkmen border region. This is by "NATO" fixed wing aircraft, he said. Local people are upset, he continued, and our Army and Border Service will relocate some of them. Berdimuhamedov said he had spoken to Karzai about this "delicate situation" more than once. General Petraeus said that he would look into this.

17. (C) General Petraeus raised the issue of commercial

overland shipment of non-lethal cargo through Turkmenistan to Afghanistan. This would help you commercially, he said. It would help Afghanistan and it would help us as we try to rebuild the infrastructure in Afghanistan. We have done this with Russia, we have agreement with Kazakhstan. Now, we want to do it with Turkmenistan. It fits the Turkmen policy of positive neutrality. And, he concluded, your approval would send a positive message to the new Administration in Washington. President Berdimuhamedov told the General, "I understand you very well. We have this conversation every year, but this would not fit our UN-approved policy of positive neutrality." We have one of the best over flight agreements with you. We have supported annual renewal of the agreement allowing your over flights containing "humanitarian" cargo and we will continue to support this. "But," he repeated, "overland, commercial cargo is different." "I know NATO," he said, "they will say that air cargo is too expensive. We want to send our goods overland also." Petraeus suggested that we discuss the definition of "humanitarian" cargo. He asked, "If you ship material for the railroad or culverts for bridges, isn't that "humanitarian?" It is material used to improve the lives of the Afghan people. The General said that he and the Foreign Minister can work on the definition of "humanitarian" * and also on the "Gas and Go" problem. President Berdimuhamedov agreed but added, "We had a good understanding with President Bush. We have a good agreement. We don't want to smash (polomat) it."

18. (C) General Petraeus then turned up the heat, telling Berdimuhamedov that he had spent several years in the struggle against extremists and terrorists. He asked the

ASHGABAT 00000083 003 OF 003

President to tell him if the success of these elements in Afghanistan was what he wanted. "Just tell me," he said, emphatically, adding that our efforts were not just for ourselves but for Afghanistan, for Turkmenistan * for the world, actually. "This is very serious, Mr. President," he emphasized. We are working constructively in Turkmenistan, he continued; you had a taste of extremist violence in Ashgabat last September. We need to stop this extremism in Afghanistan and prevent its spread beyond Afghanistan's borders. Berdimuhamedov said that the General was correct. He described his own visit to Afghanistan to give Karzai moral support after the attack on him. "We understand you without words," he said, "but we cannot avoid the law (n.b., a reference to positive neutrality). Our status has been confirmed by the UN," he emphasized. In general, Berdimuhamedov said, we have a positive attitude. Of course, there are details and you can discuss them with the Foreign Minister.

19. (C) General Petraeus concluded saying that we supported the rule of law. That is what we are doing in Afghanistan, and we are in Afghanistan under a UN Security Council Resolution. The meeting concluded with Berdimuhamedov expressing his appreciation to the General for the meeting and the discussion. He asked the General to convey his greetings to President Bush and President-Elect Obama. He also mentioned his great respect for career military officers noting that his father had been one * with the rank of Colonel.

110. (C) Comment. While the discussion did not move Berdimuhamedov off the dime on the issue of transporting commercial, overland cargo through Turkmenistan to Afghanistan, it did provide a good -- rather intense, actually -- exchange on the matter. The follow up meeting with the Foreign Minister, which also had its intense moments, went into more depth on this issue. Of course, it also was an opportunity for the CENTCOM Commander and President Berdimuhamedov to size each other up personally. It was clear that Berdimuhamedov appreciated General Petraeus' approach * providing a detailed briefing and, in general, treating Berdimuhamedov as a serious player. In the

opinion of the Charge, the two were able to interact very well with each other, even when the exchange became intense. This bodes well for future exchanges relating to Afghanistan.
END COMMENT.

¶11. (C) CONTINUED COMMENT: Berdimuhamedov appeared relaxed and confident despite the meeting coming on the heels of a lengthy session of the Turkmen Cabinet of Ministers on Thursday at which Berdimuhamedov announced a rather dramatic shuffling of Government officials at all levels of government. Also noteworthy was the Turkmen provision for a stand up TV appearance which allowed the General, in full uniform, the opportunity to take his message to the Turkmen people. END COMMENT.

¶12. (C) During the conversation Berdimuhamedov asked the Charge to begin exploratory work for a possible visit to the U.S. later this year. Such a visit and a meeting, even if short, with the President, could provide effective leverage on Berdimuhamedov to allow Turkmenistan's participation in the Northern Distribution Network.
MILES